

# Wedler, Eduard

## The Media System of Malawi

### – Bachelorarbeit –

Hochschule Mittweida – University of Applied Sciences (FH)

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# Wedler, Eduard The Media System of Malawi

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation purports to examine the media system in its entirety of the sub-Saharan country Malawi. After changing to a multi-party system in 1994, and thereafter following a liberalisation programme of the media in general afterwards; the media industry in Malawi continues to struggle in the present day. In the beginning a number of new media houses were established, but not all could survive the hard economic conditions that prevailed. A subsidiary intention of the research was also to give a brief overview on the legal and thus regulating environment in which the media operates, this deviated significantly from the past. One had to try to interpret how much influence the government still has and if the media censorship is still at issue in Malawi today.

Another aim was to identify and to illustrate the active media production houses involved in the media sector such as print media and broadcasting in radio and television, there is also an account of the status of the current service providers in the telecommunications sector. Finally complications and existing problems were discovered, which are still facing the media industry in Malawi at the present day.

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## List of Abbreviations

cf.	compare
ed.	editor
GL	Gender Links
GMBS	Gender and Media Baseline Study
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ISP	Internet Service Provider
MACRA	Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority
MANA	Malawi News Agency
MBC	Malawi Broadcasting Corporation
MCM	Media Council of Malawi
MISA	Media Institute of Southern Africa
NAMISA	National Media Institute of Southern Africa
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDNP	Malawi Sustainable Development Network Programme
TM	Telekom Malaysia

## Preface

I got the idea to write about this topic, when Jones Mbera (a Malawian friend), offered me to come visit him and see his country. Before I met him I knew nothing about Malawi. So I took the opportunity to visit him and thereafter decided to write my dissertation about the local media there as well.

At the beginning, during my research on the basic information about this country, I found it difficult to find literature about the local media. I was very surprised that there was no detailed overview about the media industry. So I decided to concentrate on Malawi's entire media organisation instead of it only being a minor subtopic.

Because of the lack of published information available it was even more important to go there and meet the very practitioners in the local media and find out what their thoughts and opinions were through interviews.

Doing it all on my own and providing my own costs and together with the short time available of a few weeks, I was quite limited in my research. Nevertheless it helped me a lot travelling there to get an abridged impression about the local media practitioners and their work in the newly developing industry.

Therefore I thank Jones Mbera for his assistance during my research in Malawi, which without his help I wouldn't be able to do.



## Introduction

Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world. The infrastructure of the media among other things therefore is very different compared to first world economies.

The monitoring of the media there is quite undeveloped and there are no institutions yet, which are able to measure how exactly the media environment in Malawi looks like. Today literature on the media systems in countries like Malawi is very rare. So therefore to get an idea of it takes time one has to begin to look for the knowledge required from the local environment.

With this dissertation I try to give a short impression about the existing media industry in Malawi. Therefore I used an empirical study formula with several qualitative interviews from representatives from the local media industry. Most of them come from local media houses. Furthermore I used studies and reports as my sources from different NGOs that are focused on developments in Malawi. It was also necessary to get information from the government itself. Especially current statistics on the different aspects of the media were helpful for this thesis.

The research also gives a short introduction on facts about the country, with its colonial history, the population and political system. Malawi's history is similar to other sub-Saharan countries, which were also colonised by the Europeans. Nevertheless there are unique differences in its history in comparison to the neighbouring countries.

The colonial history played a significant role in impacting the media and developing into what it is now in its current form in Malawi. The political history in particular played a big role in the media's development of nowadays. Following from colonial times was a devastating famine at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which brought big social and economic problems that still affect the economy now.

Another area of interest is the population. This dissertation reveals how it is growing and tries to give an overview about the diversity of the different ethnic groups with their own languages. Next it shows the political system and how the current government is constructed.

The subject on censorship and regulation shows, how the media is interpreted by the Malawian Constitution. Therefore this document explains the regulations and interferences, which are prevalent in the government.

An important component of this thesis is the media environment. I collected information from the different media institutions, which create the media in Malawi. Those public and commercial institutions are from the print and electronic media. The communication sector is crucial here for the media environment and its development.

The gender ratio in the media shows the difference between men and women in society.

Further I explain the difficulties and problems evident in the media sector today and the interest of people in the international media arena.

The conclusion closes this dissertation with a short comment about the current media system in Malawi.

# 1 Malawi from colonisation till today

## 1.1 A brief history

Malawi's colonisation by the British Empire began at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Nyasaland Districts Protectorate was established in 1891 and two years later in 1893 it was called the British Central Africa Protectorate. Sir Harry Hamilton Johnston was the first British consul general and commissioner.<sup>1</sup>

From 1907 onwards the protectorate was then called Nyasaland.

In 1953 Nyasaland (Malawi), Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) were united. By that time the area was called the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Because of the Federation from the earliest 1950's an opposition of native Africans started to grow and in 1958 it became evident that an instrument of change would be wrought in the form of Hastings Kamuzu Banda as their leader.<sup>2</sup>

The Federation was dissolved on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1963. And on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1964 Malawi became independent as a member of the Commonwealth of Nations.<sup>3</sup>

Two years later on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1966 Malawi became fully independent with a republican constitution and a one-party system. By that time the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) was now the only political party in Malawi. It was now under the leadership of Hastings Banda who unfailingly and ruthlessly suppressed any opposition.<sup>4</sup>

The Banda regime began in 1963 and in 1964 when Malawi became a republic he was elected the first President of Malawi. In 1971 he was made president for life by decree.

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<sup>1</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica.com

<sup>2</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica.com

<sup>3</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica.com

<sup>4</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica.com

During the Banda regime Malawi had to suffer a lot. It was one of the 10 poorest countries in the world then. All of the economy was under state control including the media.<sup>5</sup>

Everything was censored and monitored by the state and only by permission of the government and its censoring departments could people do their business.<sup>6</sup>

By that time corruption, poverty and food shortages were major problems in Malawi.<sup>7</sup>

Then in the early 1990s reforms began to transform the country. 1992 saw the inclusion of two new opposition parties, the Alliance for Democracy and the United Democratic Front (UDF) and following in May 1994 after more than 30 years of dictatorship Malawi had its first multi-party elections.<sup>8</sup>

Hastings Banda lost the elections against Bakili Muluzi of the UDF by a substantial margin.<sup>9</sup>

In the beginning of the twenty-first century Malawi suffered a famine. According to the Human Development Report 2007/2008, between the years 2001 and 2002 an estimated one third of the population was affected by the food crisis. The reason for the crisis was erratic rainfall, which reduced the national production of maize to 32 percent, from a record high in the 1999/2000 season. This crisis was caused by a sequence of unexpected events. Mismanagement by the government of Malawi was also one of the reasons for the famine. By downplaying the food deficit and referring to erroneous information, the government made some critical judgment mistakes. Drought and continued bad agricultural practices kept the Malawian population in near starvation until 2006.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Malopa 2009

<sup>6</sup> Ntonga 2009

<sup>7</sup> Osman 2009

<sup>8</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica.com

<sup>9</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica.com

<sup>10</sup> Roshni 2007, 3 ff.

## 1.2 Population

Malawi has a population of 14,268,711 million people in 2009.<sup>11</sup>

The growth rate is very high. Regarding the World Population Data Sheet, Malawi's population had a Natural Increase of 3.1 percent in 2009. In the next twenty years the population is suggested to almost double.<sup>12</sup>

This is causing several economic and social problems. Especially with recourse to food and energy efforts are the enormous tasks that the Malawian Government has to get a handle on at the present time and towards the future. Energy shortages continue to cause significant problems. Malawi doesn't have enough power stations to generate the supply needed to sustain its growth or population and it is not able to draw on electricity from neighbouring countries because of absent connections existing at the moment between them.<sup>13</sup>

In 2009 during the research for this dissertation for example the electricity delivered between the different areas in the cities had to be switched off. Those part time power outages were however publicised in the newspapers.

For small broadcasters without their own power generators (especially for their transmitters to work) it means continued interruptions during broadcasting. Even when they are able to broadcast in those areas with a short interlude of a couple of hours in electricity supply, it won't be received because of the radio receivers, which have been switched off.<sup>14</sup>

Water supply is also not always guaranteed, especially during the dry seasons.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> CIA World Factbook 2009

<sup>12</sup> Population Reference Bureau (ed.) 2009, 6

<sup>13</sup> Chapuma 2009

<sup>14</sup> Chapuma 2009

<sup>15</sup> Chapuma 2009

- Almost half of the population (46%) in Malawi is under the age of 15 (in Germany only 14%).<sup>16</sup>
- The literacy rate from the age of 15 is 62.7% of the population. 76.1% of males can read and write. Females only 49.8% (2003 est.)<sup>17</sup>

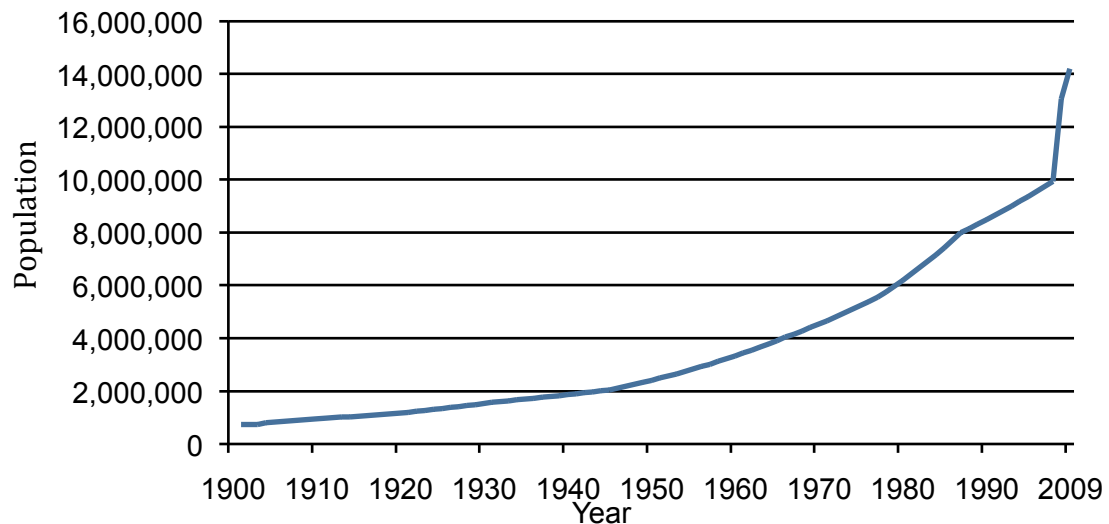
The expenditure for education is 5.8% of GDP in 2003.<sup>18</sup>

The following chart shows the growth rate in the population from 1900 to 2009.

The first census was in 1931. The rates between 1901 and 1930 are estimated.

In 1945 the growth rate was 1.9 % and in 2008 2.8%.<sup>19</sup>

*Figure 1: Population at successive censuses*<sup>20</sup>



<sup>16</sup> Population Reference Bureau (ed.) 2009, 6 ff.

<sup>17</sup> CIA World Factbook 2009

<sup>18</sup> CIA World Factbook 2009

<sup>19</sup> The National Statistical Office of Malawi (ed.) 2009

<sup>20</sup> Adapted from: The National Statistical Office of Malawi (ed.) 2009

- Malawi like other African countries has many different ethnic groups. They are the Chewa, Nyanja, Tumbuka, Yao, Lomwe, Sena, Tonga, Ngoni, Ngonde groups. Asian and European people also reside in Malawi (1998 census).<sup>21</sup>
- 79.9% are Christian, 12.8% Muslim, 3% are practising other religions and 4.3% have no religion.(1998 census)<sup>22</sup>
- According to the Malawian Constitution there is no official language. English is however the language of instruction used.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless Chichewa is the most widely spoken language in Malawi, which has a majority of 57.2% speakers. Other languages are Chinyanja 12.8%, Chiyao 10.1%, Chitumbuka 9.5%, Chisena 2.7% Chilomwe 2.4%, Chitonga 1.7%, and some others at 3.6% (1998 census).<sup>24</sup>

- 19% of Malawi's population lives in urban areas (2008).<sup>25</sup>

This means that 81 % of the population relies on farming.

Malawi doesn't have any rich deposits of natural resources and agriculture is therefore the most important economic business in the country.<sup>26</sup>

### 1.3 Political System

Since 1994 Malawi has a multiparty democracy. The current Malawian President is Bingu wa Mutharika. He has been president since May 2004 and was re-elected with 66% percent of the vote in May 2009. His opponent John Tembo had 30.7% of the votes and followed by 3.3% by other opponents. Next elections will be held in May 2014. President Bingu wa Mutharika is both the head of state and the head of government. <sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> CIA World Factbook 2009

<sup>22</sup> CIA World Factbook 2009

<sup>23</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica.com

<sup>24</sup> CIA World Factbook 2009

<sup>25</sup> CIA World Factbook 2009

<sup>26</sup> Osman, 2009

<sup>27</sup> CIA World Factbook 2009

- The executive cabinet has 46 members who are named by the president. The president is elected by popular vote for five years and can be elected for a second term.<sup>28</sup>
- The legislative branch is the unicameral National Assembly with 193 seats. The members are elected by a popular vote and also have a term of five years.<sup>29</sup>
- The judicative branch has the Supreme Court of Appeal, the High Court and the Magistrate courts. The president appoints the Chief Justice and the regular Court members are appointed on the advice of the Judicial Services Commission.<sup>30</sup>

Corruption is still a big concern. Therefore under an Act of Parliament called the Corrupt Practices Act of 1995, the Malawian Anti-Corruption Bureau was established. It started in 1998 and has two important tasks in fighting corruption, which are enforcement and prevention. This involves Investigations, Prosecution, Prevention and Public Education. The government of Malawi has also undertaken further Public Sector reforms against corruption. It enacted the Money Laundry Act and has established the Financial Intelligence Centre.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> CIA World Factbook 2009

<sup>29</sup> CIA World Factbook 2009

<sup>30</sup> CIA World Factbook 2009

<sup>31</sup> cf. Nampota no date, 1 ff.



## 2 Censorship and regulation

### 2.1 Media Freedom

During the era of Dr. Banda and the MCP, Malawi was under dictatorial rule that manifested itself in the abuse of human rights as well as the lack of a free press, freedom of speech and free flow of information<sup>32</sup>. In fact, during this period Malawi did not have a clear direction in regarding a formalised National Media Policy and no effort was made to formulate one. Political power then was further consolidated through institutionalisation of internal controls over the mass media. Consequently freedom of expression and opinion, freedom of the press, and the right to information were severely curtailed. The Department of Information and the Censorship Board were some of the state channels used, to control the mass media to the extent that only positive news about government and party activities were passed onto the masses. Even publications produced by religious organisations were also subjected to heavy government censorship. Domestic television was not known then until 1999 when Malawi embraced multi-party democracy.<sup>33</sup>

However, when Malawi embraced a multi-party democracy in 1994 after the referendum in 1993 the media landscape changed. With the advent of political pluralism, freedom of expression with the mass media came about bringing some of the vital elements needed in the new dispensation. This was further cemented by a Constitutional review, which included a human rights chapter, which was not available before. The republication of the constitution adopted in 1994, now guarantees freedom of expression and media freedom. The Constitution of Malawi, with the human rights chapter now guarantees the right to freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information. For instance Section 35 Chapter IV of the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi May 1994, states:<sup>34</sup>

“Every person shall have freedom of expression.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Media Sustainability Index 2006-2007

<sup>33</sup> Chiyamwaka 2009, 4

<sup>34</sup> Chiyamwaka 2009, 4

<sup>35</sup> [sdnp.org.mw](http://sdnp.org.mw)

The right of the press to freedom of expression is enshrined in section 36, which states:

“The press shall have the right to report and publish freely within Malawi and abroad, and to be accorded the fullest possible facilities for access to public information.”<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless the right to freedom of expression is not absolute. It is limited by the constitution’s Sections 44 (2) (3), 45 (3) a, and 45 (2), as applicable when the judiciary deems appropriate. The constitutional provisions are also limited by laws, such as the Protected Names and Emblems Act, as well as little or no legislation yet, which regulates access to information.<sup>37</sup>

The proprietor and director of Capital Radio FM, Alaudin Osman has challenged in the Courts some of these limitation laws but there have been no reviews to the challenges over the past two years and the status quo remains the same since 2006. He says that those cases are still remaining in some offices and will be there till he or somebody else starts continuing to challenge them in the courts.<sup>38</sup>

## 2.2 The Malawi Communications Act

Currently, the media in Malawi is governed by the Malawi Communications Act, which was passed by Parliament in November 1998<sup>39</sup>. This Act provides a legal framework for the reconstitution of the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) as a public broadcaster and the establishment of an independent regulatory authority, the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA). The Act replaced the Malawi Posts and Telecommunications Act (No 29 of 1994), the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation Act (Cap 20:01) and the Radio-Communications Act (Cap 68:02). With respect to regulation of broadcasting and its procedures,<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> [sdnp.org.mw](http://sdnp.org.mw)

<sup>37</sup> Media Sustainability Index Malawi 2008, 2

<sup>38</sup> Osman 2009

<sup>39</sup> The Malawi Communications Act 1998, 2

<sup>40</sup> The Malawi Communications Act 1998, 2 ff.

## 2.3 Legislation that governs the media

Malawi has several statutes that pertain to the media. Some of them were passed before independence from Britain in 1964. That poses a threat to freedom of expression and editorial independence of the media. The principal statutes governing the mass media in Malawi are the:<sup>41</sup>

- Communications Act, (Act 41 of 1998), which provides for the regulation of telecommunications, post and broadcasting in Malawi;
- Printed Publications Act, (Act 18 of 1947), which governs the print media and which provides for the registration of newspapers with the Government Archives;
- Censorship and Control of Entertainments Act, (Act 11 of 1968), which regulates the pre-approval of content that is distributed to the public and which provides for the regulation of entertainment productions;
- Official Secrets Act, (Act 3 of 1913), which protects official state secrets against disclosure; and
- Commercial Advertising (Traditional Music) Control Act, 1978, which regulates the music in advertisements.<sup>42</sup>

However almost every media institution in Malawi agrees that media freedom does exist and that journalists can write and broadcast what they want as long as it is within the law. But there are a few laws, which still exist and restrict parts of media freedom, according to the Media Sustainability Index, and must be updated. The constitution guarantees are also sometimes conveniently ignored. For instance the government still interferes with media houses if they report something against the interests of some politicians. During the elections in 2009 such cases arose.

In theory journalists can write without fear and prejudice, as long as what they write is factual based. But in practise, especially the journalists who are employed by the public media houses cannot report anything negative on the ruling party.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> cf. Media Sustainability Index Malawi 2008, 2

<sup>42</sup> SADC Media Law Handbook 2003, 14

<sup>43</sup> Osman 2009

“To listen to the always good news about the government made the public tired”(Osman, 2009).

There seems to be a big difference in authority and workflow between the public and the commercial media houses. While the journalists from the commercial media houses like the radio stations and newspapers can work without being afraid of censure, the journalists at public media houses are much more reserved and try to do more in the interest of the ruling party and their supporters.

Regarding the Media Sustainability Index 2008 political influence threatens editorial independence in state broadcasting and the legal guarantees are weak. The state media is not independent from government influence and their articles are not balanced and lack impartiality. The heads of the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) and Television Malawi (TVM) are appointed by and answer to the government. This makes the public media not very independent.<sup>44</sup>

There are reports of the public media being biased towards the government of the day. The outcry tends to rise especially when getting close to elections. The state media fail often to balance their coverage because they say they have limited resources and opposition leaders have come to even shun them entirely.

In Malawi, libel can be either a criminal or a civil issue. Criminal libel is punishable by two years imprisonment. The judiciary offers journalists hope by treating cases against them as misdemeanours. Most libel cases are treated as civil cases and settled out of court. Journalists are rarely sued for publishing defamatory stories. So when they are sued, the case is usually settled out of court. Some politicians use the threat of a defamation suit as a lever against critical reportage. In libel cases, journalists who are not plaintiffs, have to prove that there is no falsity or malice intended. Luckily the public at large seems to support journalists who stay in conflict with those politicians. This means that the general public is well aware of its rights to freedom of speech.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Media Sustainability Index Malawi 2008, 3

<sup>45</sup> Media Sustainability Index Malawi 2008, 3

## 2.4 Access to information

The lack of policy on access to information leaves journalists legally disadvantaged and unprotected. Even the research for this dissertation exposed difficulties in collecting credible information. Especially bureaucrats in various government departments limit any access to information.

Access to information in Malawi is still a challenge especially for the media. Section 37 of the constitution states that:

“Subject to any Act of Parliament, every person shall have the right to access to all information held by the State. Or any of its organs at any level of Government in so far as such information is required for the exercise of his rights.”

But even if this Section exists, there has still not been any legislation to enforce it. Hopes for a more open environment were shattered with Parliament’s failure to successfully introduce the Access to Information Bill. The bill was presented to Parliament in June 2007, during the parliamentary budget session, but it was shot down. The National Media Institute of Southern Africa (NAMISA), in partnership with human rights movements in Malawi, continued to lobby and advocate for passage of the bill. It is expected that the bill will be introduced again. The biggest problem with public officers is that they kowtow to their superiors or the requested information is ‘classified information’.<sup>46</sup>

The access to Information Bill will go a long way towards ensuring media practitioners have easy access to information, mainly from officers holding public office. Until it is passed however, journalists in Malawi will continue to find it a challenge in getting information from public officials.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> cf. Masangano 2009

<sup>47</sup> Media Sustainability Index Malawi 2008, 3

## 2.5 The Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority

The Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) is mandated to regulate the provision of broadcasting in Malawi in the manner, which it considers, is best suited to meet demand for broadcasting services. It is a regulator for the broadcasting, telecommunications and post industry as well as for other spectrums. The reason for establishing MACRA was because of the change in the media system in Malawi. With the establishment of several independent and commercial media houses there was a need to redress such regulation. Before MACRA there were other organisations, which regulated the market. Malawi Telecommunications Limited (MTL) used to regulate the broadcasting, the telecommunications and also the frequencies sector. The other organisation was the postal department, which regulated the post. Both organisations became united and after being privatised in 1999 they were split up again. MTL became an independent company and the postal department became the Malawi Post Corporation. The government decided that the role of regulation should be in the hand of an independent regulator. After a bill was passed in parliament MACRA was then established.<sup>48</sup>

MACRA has four functions in the broadcasting sector, one of these, which is to do with licensing. It gives licenses to broadcasters that apply. It then monitors the sector and insures that broadcasters stick to the standards that were contained in the licenses and in the Communications Act. The fourth function handles complaints that are coming from the public. In the communications and postal sectors it has the same functions. It also ensures that the consumer gets the right quality of service<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> cf. Masangano 2009

<sup>49</sup> cf. Masangano 2009

Figure 2: MACRA building in Blantyre



## 2.6 Media Council of Malawi

The Media Council of Malawi (MCM) is a self-regulatory body for the media in Malawi. It sets the standards in media professionalism in the interest of the public. MCM is an independent council that upholds the values of accountability, integrity and excellence, which aims to develop and improve the media. To the list of members are other media houses and other institutions that are involved in the media of Malawi.<sup>50</sup>

Nevertheless irrespective of some of the archaic media laws in force until now, there is more freedom of expression in Malawi, than there was many years ago during the MCP era. Today people have been empowered and are able to speak and hold people accountable in public offices.<sup>51</sup>

Since 1994 when Malawi began to acquire more media freedom until today the changes implemented were substantial. Even if there are still some conflicts it is a long way from where it was about fifteen years ago. Nevertheless the media is free so long as there are people and institutions that protect and maintain it. Institutions like the National Media Institute of Southern Africa (NAMISA) and the Media Council of Malawi (MCM) and others try their best to follow this ideal.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Media Council of Malawi 2010

<sup>51</sup> cf. Chiyamwaka 2009, 6

<sup>52</sup> cf. Media Council of Malawi 2010

### 3 Media environment

“Malawi’s current media is a reflection of a multiparty democracy. Before that the country had a one party system of the Malawian Congress Party under Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda” (Osman 2009).

During this time for more than 30 years the Malawian people lived under suppressed freedom. The media was badly repressed as well. The newspapers in those times reflected the interests of the ruling government. The journalists had always to be very careful about what they wrote.

There was only one main radio station, which was the Malawian Broadcasting Corporation (MBC). It was state controlled since independence in 1964.<sup>53</sup> Oppression and violence against journalists were very common. It is one of the reasons why the media in Malawi was not really developed.<sup>54</sup>

During the dictatorship years of Dr. Banda only one media house was able to publish news. It belonged and was controlled exclusively by the President. With the changeover in the 1990s from the one party system to the multiparty democracy the media started to grow.

With the legalisation of other parties in 1993 the media also started to be liberalised.<sup>55</sup>

But because of the enormous gap of almost 30 years dictatorship and censorship Malawi’s journalism was in a very bad way.

By that time only very few people had the opportunity to train in journalism in Malawi. Most people left secondary school early. And only a few of them joined a university or a media house to study.<sup>56</sup>

Because of this few people had formal education and as such the journalists just wrote what was expected by the regime. The people followed the government

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<sup>53</sup> Osman 2009

<sup>54</sup> Ntonga 2009

<sup>55</sup> Osman 2009

<sup>56</sup> Ntonga 2009



and supported it without any questions. In those days journalism was just a tool of the government to stay in power.<sup>57</sup>

With the media liberalisation beginning from the early 90s the people started to ask more questions about the ruling government. More newspapers originated and published their own stories and interests. During the first democratic elections the quality of journalism wasn't really appreciated. Each party substituted their own interests and tried to use the media to get the attention of the public.

Alfred Ntonga says "the free press was born in Malawi before journalism was born." In the beginning of press freedom in Malawi in the early 90s more than twenty newspapers were found on the streets in Malawi.<sup>58</sup> Most of them in the bigger cities like Lilongwe and Blantyre. But because of the limited knowledge on how to run a media house nearly all of them collapsed after a short period of publishing.

Financial problems for almost all publishers and broadcasters were to be the end of them. Malawi's independent media industry is very young and therefore has many critical things to learn. Especially in the marketing sector, which seems to be inadequately developed. Most of the Malawian broadcasters and also the newspapers are commercial. But because of the poor country itself, the media industry is affected as well.<sup>59</sup>

One of the critical questions to be asked is the demand in media. At the moment nobody knows exactly how many people read newspapers, listen to radio or watch TV in Malawi. The newspapers can easily lie about their circulation but in truth even they don't know how many people really read them.

Almost 40% of the Malawian population can't read or write.<sup>60</sup> Because of this distortion this group doesn't have access to the print media.

Only a small number of people there can afford a television. Therefore the TV market is very small. In Malawi there is only one TV station, which is also controlled by the government.

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<sup>57</sup> Osman 2009

<sup>58</sup> cf. Osman 2009

<sup>59</sup> Malopa 2009

<sup>60</sup> CIA World Factbook 2009

“Radio is therefore the most powerful medium of communication in Malawi” (Osman 2009).

To buy a radio is very cheap. Almost all rural areas already receive some of the radio broadcasters. In areas without electricity, television can’t be used so the radio is used instead as it only needs batteries. This medium is the most interesting and useful tool used for communication in Malawi.

Also because of the culture where communication mostly takes place verbal. Radio usage is very high in Malawi. But nobody yet has done significant research about how the people interact with media up to the present time.<sup>61</sup>

### 3.1 News agencies in Malawi

Malawi currently has only the government news agency, which is the “Malawi News Agency” (MANA).

There are no other independent Malawian news agencies. Therefore the local journalists have to use the foreign news agencies often to get any information. There are efforts by local independent groups to establish an agency but at the moment no movement is mentioned.<sup>62</sup>

### 3.2 Print media

Print media in Malawi began with the British settlers in 1895 when they established “The Malawi Times” newspaper to serve the interests of the expatriate British community. It is one of the oldest newspapers in Africa.

It was the first and only newspaper until the early 1940s in Malawi.

From the 1940s some other newspapers came about which were published once a month and were aimed at the native population.<sup>63</sup>

After the end of the Banda era in the early nineties a large number of newspapers came into being. More than twenty newspapers were being printed at that time.

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<sup>61</sup> Osman 2009

<sup>62</sup> Kazako 2009

<sup>63</sup> cf. Osman 2009

Today most of them don't exist anymore. But nevertheless some print media publishers could survive through the times of change and even the newer among them could establish themselves in the market.<sup>64</sup>

Today Malawi has five independent media houses. Only two of them have a daily newspaper, which are the following:

- Blantyre Newspapers Limited (BNL), which is the oldest newspaper in Malawi. It was established in 1895 and is considered one of the oldest papers on the whole African continent. After big financial problems at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the media house recovered and could exist in the market. Today it publishes the "Malawi News", "Daily Times", "Sunday Times" and the "Weekend Times". It is owned by the family of Dr Banda and run by a board of directors. The "Sunday Times" started being printed on the 1st August 2004.<sup>65</sup> Just recently, in August 2009 this media house started to print its fourth newspaper, which is the "Weekend Times".
- Nation Publications Limited (NPL), publishes the "Weekend Nation", "Daily Nation" and "Nation on Sunday". It was established in July 1993. In the beginning this media house started with only "The Nation". At first it printed two editions a week, then later three and now five times a week. In 1995 the NPL started with a second newspaper, called the "Saturday Nation" which was later changed to the "Weekend Nation". In 2006 the media house also introduced the "Nation on Sunday". At the beginning the media house had only eight members. Now there are over 220 people who work for the NBL publishers.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> cf. Osman 2009

<sup>65</sup> The Daily Times 2005, 2 ff.

<sup>66</sup> cf. Ntonga 2009

Other Media houses are the:

- Montfort Media, which publishes the “ Lamp Magazine” and the “Together Magazine”;
- Guardian Publication Limited, which prints the „Guardian Newspaper“ and the last media house;
- Pride Magazine

BNL and NBL Publishers, which print newspapers daily, are the two big competitors in Malawi’s publishing market. Nonetheless the circulation is very small.

The “Daily Nation” has a circulation of fewer than 17,000 and the “Weekend Nation” up to 55,000. The next stage that the media houses want to focus on is the Internet.<sup>67</sup>

The printing costs in Malawi are very high, which makes it more difficult for smaller publishers, who don’t have their own printing machines, to survive.<sup>68</sup>

The newspapers are concentrated mostly in the major cities of Lilongwe and Blantyre. Both those cities are competing for the media houses. Some of those institutions followed the government’s move and now are also based in Lilongwe.

### 3.3 Radio

Radio has the biggest diversity of media houses in Malawi.

During the time of Dr. Banda’s dictatorship there was only the government controlled radio station, which was called the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC). It was used as a tool to control the public. MBC was established in 1964.

Independent radio stations in Malawi started to broadcast post Banda era. But many of them had the same fate as the newspapers, which went bankrupt. Nevertheless some of the independent radio stations in the nineties survived the change during the hard times. Some new radio stations have been established in the last

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<sup>67</sup> Ntonga 2009

<sup>68</sup> Osman 2009

decade. Some radio stations nowadays have almost 100% coverage in Malawi. Especially some of the commercial radio stations, which are running competently.<sup>69</sup>

The radio media houses can be separated into four groups. Those groups are the Public Broadcaster, the Commercial Radio Stations, the Religious Radio Stations and the Community Radio Stations.

The following listing shows the media houses with addresses for radio broadcasting in Malawi. This list was given by MACRA.<sup>70</sup>

### *3.3.1 Public Broadcaster*

- Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) Radio1  
P. O. Box 30133  
Blantyre 3  
Frequency: OM OC FM 94.1
- Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) Radio2  
P. O. Box 30133  
Blantyre 3  
Frequency: 92.2

### *3.3.2 Commercial radio stations*

- Zodiak Broadcasting Station  
P.O. Box 31236  
Blantyre 3  
Frequency: FM 95.1 (Northern Region, 92.9 (Central),  
95.6 or 97 (Southern region)
- Capital Radio  
Private Bag 437  
Blantyre  
Frequency: FM 102

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<sup>69</sup> cf. Osman 2009

<sup>70</sup> Masangano 2009

- Joy Radio  
Private Bag 17  
Limbe  
Frequency: FM 89.6
- FM 101 Power  
Private Bag 671  
Blantyre  
Frequency: FM 101
- Malawi Institute of Journalism (MIJ)  
P.O. Box 30165  
Blantyre 3  
Frequency: FM 90.3
- Star FM  
P.O. Box 31033  
Blantyre 3  
Frequency: 88.7

### *3.3.3 Religious radio stations*

- Trans World Radio  
P.O. Box 52  
Lilongwe  
Frequency: FM 89.1, 106.4, 106.5, 91.1, 96.4 and 90.7
- Channel for All Nations  
P.O. Box 1220  
Lilongwe
- Radio Maria  
P.O. Box 408  
Mangochi  
Frequency: FM 88.5 (Mangochi), 99.4 (Zomba), 99.2 (Blantyre),  
94.0 (Dowa)

- Radio Alinafe  
P.O. Box 631  
Lilongwe  
Frequency: Fm 97.1
- Radio Tigabane  
P.O. Box 252  
Mzuzu  
Frequency: FM 96.0
- Radio Islam  
P.O. Box 51516  
Limbe  
Frequency: FM 97.6
- Cavalry Family Radio  
P.O. Box 30239  
Blantyre 3
- Living Waters Radio  
P.O. Box 923  
Blantyre
- Seventh Day Adventist  
P.O. Box 951  
Blantyre

#### *3.3.4 Community radio stations*

- Mudziwathu Community Radio in Mchinji  
P.O. Box 207  
Mchinji
- Dzimwe Community Radio in Mangochi  
Private Bag  
4 Monkeybay  
Frequency: FM 93.1
- Nkhotakota Community Radio in Nkhotakota  
Private Bag 48

## Nkhotakota

- Mzimba Community Radio in Mzimba  
Private Bag 64  
Mzimba
- African Bible College Radio in Lilongwe  
P.O. Box 1028  
Lilongwe  
Frequency: FM 88.3

The Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) regulates all frequencies. During the research for this thesis several interviewed people said that MACRA regulates broadcasters but doesn't control them.

"MACRA is regulator but doesn't censor the media in Malawi. And I don't know any institution, which could do it here. MACRA might be controlled by the government but the Malawian courts are still independent and free of any influence."<sup>71</sup>

In the past few years some cases between MACRA and different radio broadcasters have been fought in the courts. Especially during the elections, and before there were always clashes, which seem to pertain to the different acting political parties at the time. Some radio stations were closed down periodically but could re-open and continue to broadcast later on.

The research for this thesis showed that the biggest problem is still the financial budget. Almost all radio stations suffer from underfunding. The equipment used is often very old and causes therefore constant problems.

Professional equipment is very expensive and must be delivered from far away.<sup>72</sup>

Most of it comes from Europe, Asia and the United States. If parts break or become faulty they often they have to be sent to the countries where they were produced.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ntonga 2009

<sup>72</sup> Kazako 2009



Even in Malawi where there are several different languages, most radio stations broadcast in Chichewa or English. Especially the commercial radio stations which focus on both languages, to reach a higher number of audiences.

According to the Managing Director of Capital FM, Alaudin Osman, community radio stations are very important for the development of Malawi. But unfortunately those radio broadcasters don't have the necessary attention yet. The five existing commercial radio stations suffer on different issues. The biggest problems being:

- Weak community ownership and involvement;
- Not enough interest by the government;
- Inadequate equipment, which often breaks down so that the audience switches then to other radio broadcasters;
- And dire financial resources<sup>74</sup>

Alaudin Osman's opinion is that community radio stations should be promoted more by the government.

"It is necessary to have those radio broadcasters because they help to develop the country and keep our culture with different ethnics groups alive"<sup>75</sup>.

For the business sector the community radio broadcasters don't play any role. The coverage and the number of listeners are too small to compete with any commercial broadcaster.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> cf. Figueredo/Hitman 2009

<sup>74</sup> Chiyamwaka 2009

<sup>75</sup> Osman 2009

<sup>76</sup> Kazako 2009

## 3.4 Television

### 3.4.1 *Public Television*

Television in Malawi doesn't have any diversity in comparison to that of radio. There is only one main channel, which is Television Malawi (TVM). This public broadcaster is based in Blantyre. Like the Broadcasting Corporation with Radio 1 and Radio 2 it is also owned 100% by the government. TVM was established on 1st April 1999. At the beginning it was a project, which according to the constitution had to be run under the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation. But then it was considered that it should be done as a private project and therefore financed by the Malawi Development Corporation.<sup>77</sup>

It was the first media house that was focused on audio-visual broadcasting in Malawi. Because of the lack of knowledge and also of technology, TVM had to be supported from foreign companies such as Scotland and Malaysia. During its existence since 1999 it ran through rough times. In 2001 the broadcasting house was gutted by fire. The channel had to be started almost from afresh. Also financial problems impeded the broadcasting. TVM for about two years had no financial support from the government. Presently the government finances the media house again and slowly it has started to recover from the past.<sup>78</sup>

The current coverage for the whole country is between 35- and 40 percent. At the moment the channel is trying to roll out a new program for the next three years to increase the range to 100 percent. There are roughly between 400,000 and 600,000 TV's in use in Malawi.<sup>79</sup>

TVM broadcasts in Chichewa and English. The main content is news and documentary films. Content is also used from foreign sources like Al-Jazeera and Deutsche Welle. The channel is starting to react more to the public. It wants to orientate itself more towards the interests of the people who are able to receive it.

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<sup>77</sup> cf. Malopa 2009

<sup>78</sup> cf. Malopa 2009

<sup>79</sup> cf. Malopa 2009

This is necessary to compete with foreign channels, which can also be received in the country.

TVM already applied for another licence at MACRA. It wants to get a second channel in Malawi, which will be focused on national development and will rely mostly on local content.<sup>80</sup>

### 3.4.2 Digital Satellite Television (DStv)

*MultiChoice Africa* is the leading digital satellite operator and pay-TV supplier in sub-Saharan Africa. It is also based in the Malawian television market. But most of the Malawian public is unable to subscribe because of the high costs involved in subscribing to satellite television. Nevertheless the number of DStv users has increased in the last few years and it continuous to do so steadily. A variety of different packages exist with different amounts of channels available per package such as the DStv “Access package”, which can be subscribed to at US\$10 per month, which attempts to allow more and more people to get access to pay-TV in Malawi. Also a slow growth in the prosperity of people makes DStv become more available in the country.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless besides a TV, a decoder still has to be purchased.

Figure 3: MultiChoice Africa<sup>82</sup>



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<sup>80</sup> cf. Malopa 2009

<sup>81</sup> Bizcommunity.com 2009

<sup>82</sup> Source from: dstvafrica.com no date

### 3.5 ICT sector

The following information were given by the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA):<sup>83</sup>

#### 3.5.1 Telecommunications Operators

- Malawi has two fixed telecommunications operators namely Malawi Telecommunications Ltd (MTL) and Access Communications Limited (ACL), which has recently been awarded a licence as a second national operator (SNO) and is yet to be rolled out.<sup>84</sup>
- MTL is owned with 20% by of the Malawian government and 80% by Telecoms Holding Ltd., which is a consortium of several investment companies plus De-tecon of Germany as the management partner for running the company. The privatisation of the formerly fully government owned operators was concluded in February 2006.
- Malawi has two mobile operators namely Telekom Networks Malawi Ltd (TNM) and Celtel Malawi Limited and MACRA is in the process of awarding a third mobile operator licence.<sup>85</sup>
- TNM was one of the first GSM operators in Africa when it launched its services in 1995 and was previously owned by Telekom Malaysia Berhad (TM) (60%) and MTL (40%). TM recently sold its shares to the Press Corporation Ltd of Malawi (PLC). Since PLC is also the major shareholder of MTL, it holds a controlling interest in both companies.
- Celtel now Zain was launched in 1999 and is part of Celtel International, recently acquired by MTC from Kuwait. Celtel has been gaining market share since its launch and is at present the leading operator with a market share of about 60 percent.<sup>86</sup>
- The Electricity Supply Corporation of Malawi (ESCOM) has advanced plans to enter the telecom sector with carrier services based on their fiber optic net-

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<sup>83</sup> Khamula 2009

<sup>84</sup> Khamula 2009

<sup>85</sup> Khamula 2009

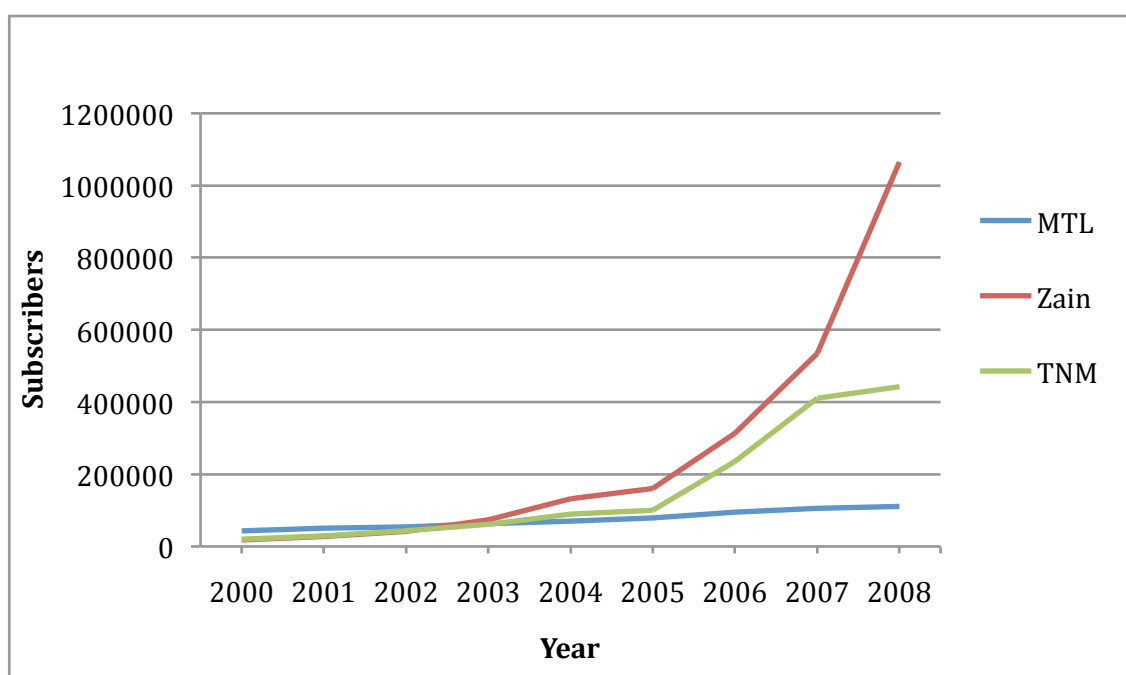
<sup>86</sup> Khamula 2009

work installed on its electricity grid. ESCOM's Carrier of Carriers Licence has been finalised which shall enable it to lease excess capacity to ICT operators.<sup>87</sup>

As of November 2008, fixed penetration levels stood at 111,133 subscribers (MTL only), this means 1,507,684 mobile subscribers (1,064,454 for Zain and 443,230 for TNM). The total number of fixed and mobile users (MTL, Zain and TNM) is 1,618,817 for a Malawian population of about 13.5 million people.<sup>88</sup>

The following graphic shows the growth rate of phone consumers between the years 2000 and 2008.

Figure 4: Growth rate of phone subscribers<sup>89</sup>



<sup>87</sup> Khamula 2009

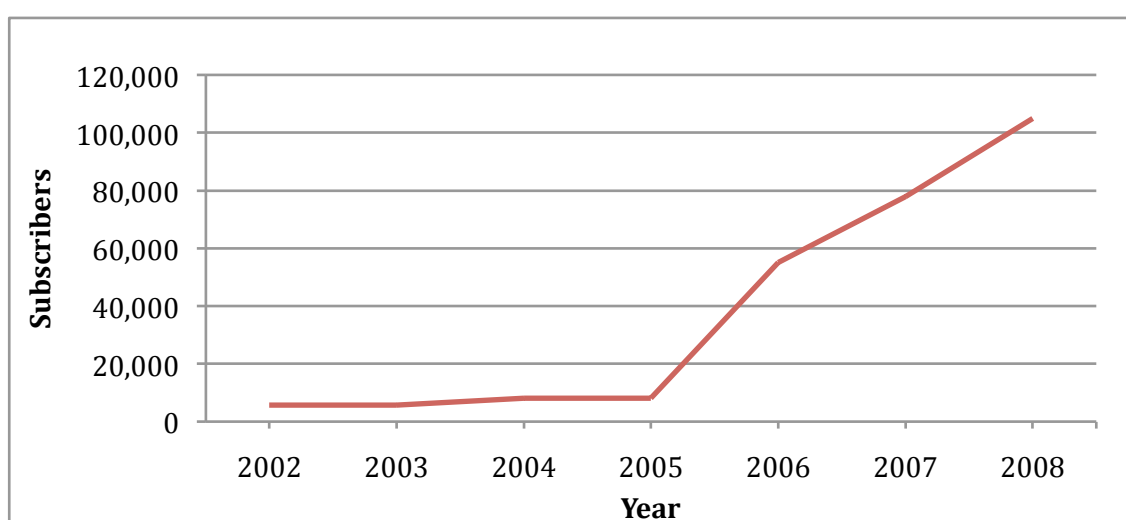
<sup>88</sup> Khamula 2009

<sup>89</sup> Adapted from: Khamula 2009

### 3.6 Internet

- There are ten active commercial Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in Malawi. Out of the license are 22 ISPs. The running ISPs offer a wide range of Internet services. The total number of customers is around 105,000 in Malawi.<sup>90</sup>
- Services are mostly delivered through dial-up connections but some ISPs are moving towards broadband wireless Internet connectivity. The fixed line operator MTL is now providing Internet Services on a free registered mode to all its paid as well as prepaid subscribers.<sup>91</sup>

Figure 5: Internet subscribers<sup>92</sup>



The graphic shows a higher growth rate of Internet users for the last three years till 2008. A better coverage and lower prices allow more and more people to connect to the Internet. But nevertheless the number of subscribers is still very low.

<sup>90</sup> Khamula 2009

<sup>91</sup> Khamula 2009

<sup>92</sup> Adapted from: Khamula 2009

The following table shows active ISPs in 2009.

*Table 1: Active Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in Malawi<sup>93</sup>*

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Contacts</b>
1	Malawi Net Limited	Box 1698 BLANTYRE 01 822 436 info@malawi.net
2	Malawi SDNP	P/Bag 303 BLANTYRE 3 TEL: 01874 979 / 875872 Email: mwsdn@sdnp.org.mw
3	NCR – Gestetner	Box 343 BLANTYRE 01 871 433 ncr@inet.mw; gestetner@inet.mw
4	Commercial Bank of Malawi (STANBIC)	Head Office, Glyn Jones Road Box 1111 , Blantyre Tel: 01 820 144
5	Malawi Telecommunications Limited	Box 937, Blantyre
6	Globe Internet Malawi Ltd	Box 5491, Limbe Tel 01 846 001. Fax:01 841 854, Email: bml@globemw.com
7	Burco Electronics Ltd	Box 934, Blantyre 01 840 777 or 099 99 71 001 ; support@burcomw.com
8	Commuteck Limited	P/ B 86 Lilongwe 01 757 201 or 01 843 482
9	Computech Business Services Limited	Box 2006, Blantyre; Fax 01 870 348
10	Sky Band Cooperation	P.O Box 2461 Blantyre

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<sup>93</sup> Source from: Khamula 2009

Following is a list of all telecommunication services in Malawi, 2009.

*Table 2: Telecommunication Services*<sup>94</sup>

<b>Telecommunication Services</b>		
3	Zain TNM MML	International Gate-way Licences
98		VSAT Terminals
143		PMR Operators
29		Aeronautical Licences
10		Active ISPs
1		Paging Licence
5		Centralised Alarm System Licences
9		Radio Dealers
64		AMR licences

Malawi is currently developing the ICT sector namely the ICT for Development Policy (ICT4D). The policy is at an advanced stage and will be presented to the Cabinet for approval. The ICT4D Policy is aimed at catalysing the socio-economic development using ICTs and is a deliberate Government Policy to improve and extend communications services to the rural and underprivileged communities.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Source from: Khamula 2009

<sup>95</sup> Khamula 2009



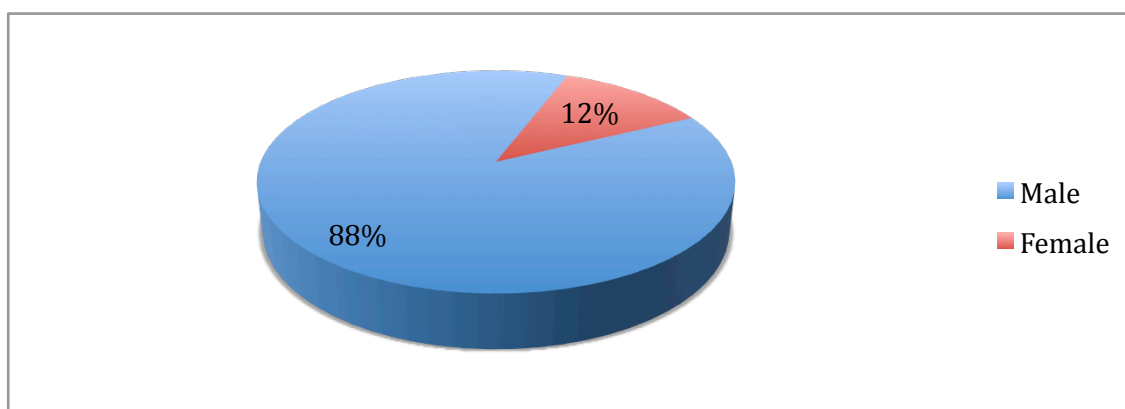
## 4 Gender ratio

According to MCM there is a large gender disparity in Malawi. Men also dominate the media environment. The institution refers to the Gender Development Index for Malawi, which is currently at 0.374.<sup>96</sup>

In September 2002 the Media institute of Southern Africa (MISA) and Gender Links (GL) conducted the Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS). Malawi is one of the 12 countries within the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) where the study was made. At that time the study was the most comprehensive study that was ever worldwide. Later national studies followed within the 12 SADC countries.<sup>97</sup>

One of the chapters in the GMBS study was an analysis of male and female sources for all media. It shows that in Malawi only 12 percent of all sources, which come on the news, are about women. The global figure of sources about women is 18 percent.<sup>98</sup>

*Figure 6: Analysis of sources from male and female for all media<sup>99</sup>*



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<sup>96</sup> Chiyamwaka 2009, 11

<sup>97</sup> Genderlinks.org.za

<sup>98</sup> MISA/GL 2003, 10

<sup>99</sup> Source from: MISA/GL 2003, 10

The GMBS study also shows that women who are producing the news are represented in the electronic media more than in the print media in Malawi.

*Table 3: People behind the news*<sup>100</sup>

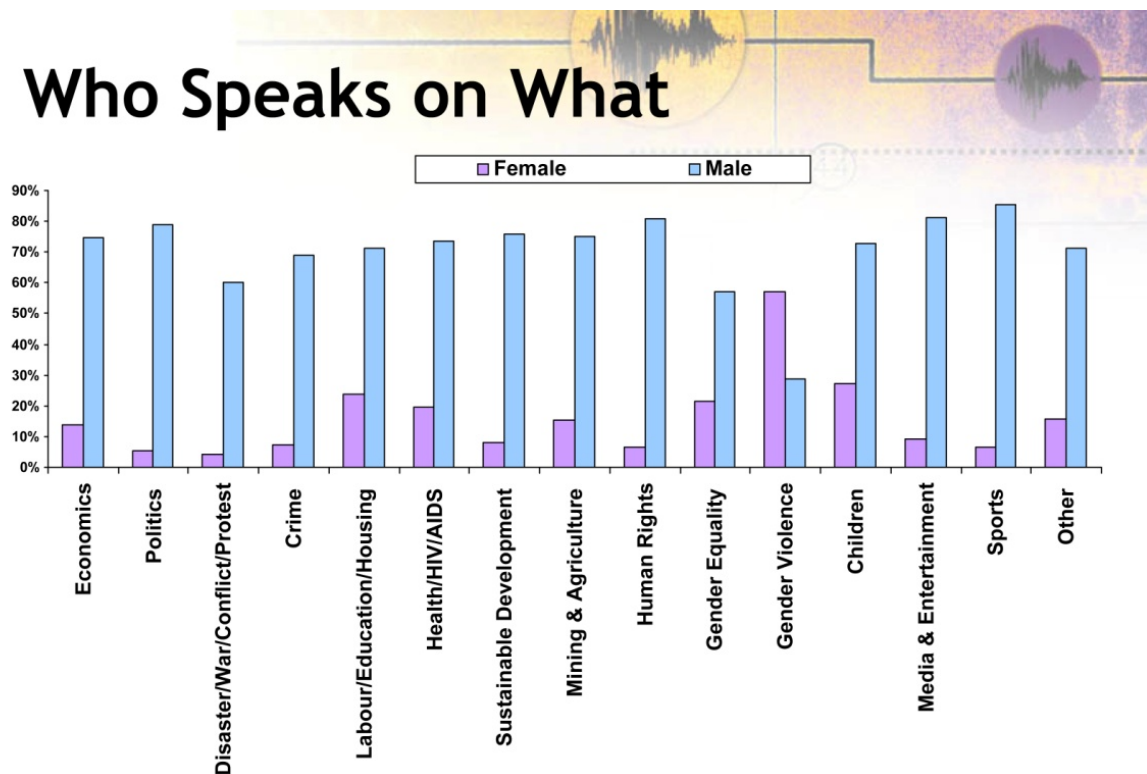
Television Presenters		Television Journalists		Radio		Print	
% of women	% of men	% of women	% of men	% of women	% of men	% of women	% of men
42	58	27	73	28	72	8	92

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<sup>100</sup> Source from: MISA/GL 2003, 15

The next figure shows how male and female practitioners are allocated. Women are mostly involved in health, HIV/AIDS development, human rights, gender equality, media and entertainment. Gender violence is the only news category in Malawi, which is dominated by women.

Figure 7: Who speaks on What<sup>101</sup>



<sup>101</sup> Source from: MISA/GL 2003, 16

## 5 Present difficulties and gaps in Malawi media

With the change to media freedom and independence and market liberalisation in the 1990s, Malawi's media had a big development on all sectors to improve the service to the public. But even so it is still far away from the standards, which are expected in such an important industry. The Media Council of Malawi (MCM) noticed the following essentials about the existing gaps in the media:<sup>102</sup>

### 5.1 Lack of management skills

Most media houses like companies in other industry sectors in Malawi suffer from undertrained and unqualified management. Often the management doesn't have the necessary skills on how to run a company. And the media houses don't invest enough time and money to improve those management skills. According to MCM the management is unable to motivate their staff most of the time, which results in a high turnover of staff. This caused shutdowns for many newspaper houses in certain instances in the past.<sup>103</sup>

Also female journalists find it difficult to work in newsrooms where they lack planning skills. Simple work methods that are usually used to run a company are simply missed in most cases. A better structure and discipline would achieve much better results. Efforts to train those managements are also done by the Media Council of Malawi. But funding is therefore necessary in support of this.<sup>104</sup>

### 5.2 Deficiency of professionally trained media practitioners

The Malawian media industry has big problems with not enough qualified professional practitioners. According to an assessment conducted by the Media Council of Malawi in 2008 there are far too few qualified people who are working in the media industry. Only a few of the employed staff are graduates from accredited

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<sup>102</sup> Media Council of Malawi 2010

<sup>103</sup> Chiyamwaka 2009, 8

<sup>104</sup> Chiyamwaka 2009, 8

schools in the country. Those media institutions are the Polytechnic and Malawi Institute of Journalism (MIJ). A survey showed that about 75% of practitioners in the media industry don't even have the minimum qualifications, for instance a certificate in journalism. Only 25% are holders of a certificate or a diploma. This shortage affects the media industry as a whole. The lack of qualified journalists causes negative effects for the country as well as for development.<sup>105</sup>

According to MCM there is a need to develop more possibilities to improve the skills of the people who work in the media industry.

Institutions such as MIJ increase the number of new up and coming professionals in the country but for those who work already in the industry, there are not enough possibilities and often no interest for further development and training.<sup>106</sup>

### 5.3 Media Ethics and Principles

The Media Council of Malawi notes that there is an imbalance between the public and the private media houses in aspects of handling political topics and the coverage of general news. There is most often no balance between the political parties in the country. Therefore the journalists do workshops to learn about ethics and related media principles but after these they seldom practise what they have learnt.

„They do not abide by the Code when they are in the newsrooms.“<sup>107</sup>

Unethical behaviour from journalists often has a negative influence on the image of journalism as a noble profession in the country. During the research for this thesis there were several cases where journalists were alleged of practising unethical behaviour in their work. Corruption and propaganda are big issues. Therefore MCM has reviewed the Media Code of Ethics and printed it out in a booklet available for distribution to all practitioners in Malawi. To fight against corruption is not only a problem in politics. To work with information and to handle it must be done carefully. All institutions in Malawi endeavour to work on it. This can be done

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<sup>105</sup> cf. Chiyamwaka 2009, 8

<sup>106</sup> Masamba 2009

<sup>107</sup> Chiyamwaka 2009, 8 f.

with more clarification about media ethics. Institutions like MCM are making an effort to decrease the corruption in the media sector by more training in media ethics.<sup>108</sup>

The research for this thesis showed that to follow media ethics is not always in everybody's interest in Malawi. Especially when the average salary for journalists is often not decent enough for a day-to-day life in Malawi.

#### 5.4 News about Development are too often behind Political interests

In terms of which news is more important, journalists and their media houses have different points of views. But most of the time political news has a higher priority than other subject matter. MCM criticises that especially stories on the front page are often devoted to political news and politicians. Some media houses make those politicians newsmakers. According to MCM social issues on development like the environment, climate change and health should be more in focus and covered more than they are at the moment. MCM suggests that journalists should be trained more in Development Communication.<sup>109</sup>

#### 5.5 Audit of readership and listenership

One of the biggest economic problems for the media in Malawi is that nobody knows how much of the served media the public really receives and uses. There is no Audit Bureau about circulation in Malawi. During the research for this thesis none of the interviewed people could tell me how many people receive their printed newspapers or broadcasted programs. The media houses gave a number of reader- and listenership surveys, which could be the optimum of recipients. The given numbers were appreciated but without any proof. The newspapers could give me the number in circulation but not how many people actually read them.

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<sup>108</sup> Chiyamwaka 2009, 8 f.

<sup>109</sup> cf. Chiyamwaka 2009, 9

In Malawi people share newspapers more often than in Europe. Public transport offers radio and often the latest editions of the two major daily newspapers to read for free.<sup>110</sup>

Without any proof of statistics the media houses justify their estimated readership and listenership on feedback made by listeners and readers of their products.

“This gap has made the media houses to hypothesize about their present outreach figures for newspapers and radios in Malawi.”<sup>111</sup>

The numbers are often based on the coverage figures of the whole country. At the moment there is no institution that can review how the different broadcasters and print media houses get their numbers. For commercial operated businesses it is this knowledge they look for about the number of audiences that they need to know about in order to subsidise these media houses and hence to expand the media market in pursuit of these interests. Advertising is important for commercial businesses. But the lack of information about user surveys keeps potential customers away.

According to MCM a regulated market with professionally operated researchers could allow media houses to come up with competitive advertising rates based on their popularity.

An Audit Bureau of circulation would bring about a better and healthier market situation in Malawi.<sup>112</sup>

## 5.6 Lack of Research Based Information

“Media is one sector in Malawi that has not been exploited in terms of media and communication research. Consequently, there is a lack of adequate theoretical knowledge about the Malawian media and no database is available on media information. It is therefore difficult to implement media products due to lack of veri-

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<sup>110</sup> Masamba 2009

<sup>111</sup> Chiyamwaka 2009, 9

<sup>112</sup> cf. Chiyamwaka 2009, 9

fiable data and this limits the growth of the industry and hinders the formulation of well-informed decisions.”<sup>113</sup>

The free media in Malawi is young. Nevertheless monitoring is necessary. The media industry will have better growth rates when people know where the issues are and how they can be solved.

### 5.7 Unavailability of Data Bases for Journalists and media information

“Currently there is no database for media practitioners or journalists in Malawi and general media information. Even the Department of Journalism in the University of Malawi does not have a repository for dissertations for journalism students graduating from the University. Lack of databases makes it difficult for researchers and other users of information to effectively obtain information or conduct research on the media in Malawi. There is a need for financial resources to establish a database where information about media, journalism and other related information on media will be stored in a computerised system for easy access and retrieval.”<sup>114</sup>

### 5.8 Media Resource Centre

“In Malawi we do not have a centre where journalists or any media practitioners can stop to get information on any media related subject. Media practitioners/journalists find it difficult when they are conducting their research. There is a need for a media resource centre equipped with Internet, computers, cameras, TV, books, periodicals on media and other related subjects which could act as one port of call for all media trainers and media practitioners, researchers from inside and outside Malawi.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Chiyamwaka 2009, 10

<sup>114</sup> Chiyamwaka 2009, 10

<sup>115</sup> Chiyamwaka 2009, 10



## 5.9 Mercenary Journalism

The Media Council of Malawi noted in a write-up, which was submitted to the Department for International Development, that there is a trend in "mercenary" Journalism going on in Malawi.

"Media houses in Malawi have journalists who work on errands to carry out special assignments for some members of the public particularly politicians. These people ask journalists to write stories on other people. Such journalists most of the time do not have a nose for news, instead they rely on other people to give them information particularly about people in politics so that they can write a biased story about them. Often the stories that come out of such news are aimed at destroying or denting/defaming the image of somebody. This practice has destroyed the characters of many Malawians who are in good standing in society to the extent of failing to repair the damages done. In addition, it leads to gross misrepresentation of facts and therefore misinforming the public."<sup>116</sup>

## 5.10 Politicians infiltrate the Media

Furthermore the Media Council of Malawi reports that besides journalists who carry out character assassinations in their stories to destroy somebody's image, there are also journalists who work directly for some politicians.

"We have media houses that have been infiltrated by politicians. A case in point is the former Minister of Information and Civic Education the Honourable Patricia Kaliati raised in August 2008. Hon, Kaliati claimed that she had a document, which alleged that UDF had bribed some journalists working in both public and private media houses to help spruce up the battered image of the UDF party then and conduct propaganda machinery that dents political opponents. MCM was prompted to carry out an investigation into this allegation. Until today no substantial information was found to prove the allegation."<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Chiyamwaka 2009, 10 f

<sup>117</sup> Chiyamwaka 2009, 11

## 6 Public interest for international matters

International media doesn't have a big influence yet in Malawi. During the time of Dr. Banda's dictatorship in the past there seems to be a similar comparison present when it comes to international interests in the media. By that time only the content from the government was seen as important and therefore able to be published.

And today it is mostly caused by the Malawian economy. Malawi is still one of the poorest countries in the world. To get investors to broadcast content from other countries is as difficult as to get them from other economical domains.<sup>118</sup> But even foreign news doesn't enjoy a big interest in the Malawian public. Regarding Alaudin Osman, Managing Director of Capital FM, the reasons therefore come from the Malawian culture itself. The people are more focused on what is happening in the local area around them. Most of them have never left the country and probably won't do it. International interests exist more when the people are wealthy and healthy. Big catastrophes around the world with big numbers of deaths might reach the villages in Malawi. People know and discussed between themselves what happened on 11th September 2001. People talk about earthquakes and other disasters. For most of them these things are just too far away. But also interest in the neighbouring countries is surprisingly small. The interest in politics in countries around Malawi doesn't really exist. Events like elections or other political changes are often not mentioned in the local media. On one side are the costs, which are necessary to be able to send journalists abroad, are just too high and on the other side the public is not really interested in general in them.<sup>119</sup> According to several interviews, who are partners from different radio stations, say local journalists use mostly foreign news agencies and other sources to get information about international matters. Radio stations spend only a few minutes a day to broadcast international news. Nevertheless some radio stations use foreign content. This comes mostly from the BBC, Deutsche Welle and Al-Jazeera.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Ntonga 2009

<sup>119</sup> cf. Osman 2009

<sup>120</sup> cf. Masamba 2009

## 7 Conclusion

This thesis gives an overview about the current status of the media environment in Malawi. With an empirical study about the acting media houses with several qualitative interviews to executives from the local media industry it gives a short summary about the challenges facing the media system of the country today.

It shows that from a legal aspect the media in Malawi is free and independent. The constitution with the Communications Act from 1998 ensures this freedom of expression among other things. But as long as there are still prevailing laws from the Dr. Banda era and before, media freedom is still in some ways vulnerable and can be undermined by contemporary politics and politicians.

After the time of changes brought about in the multiparty-system in the 1990s the media is quite young still and lacks much substance and faces considerable challenges. Those problems are well known by executive practitioners and there is ongoing interest to try improving the status of media freedom. However the government, and it doesn't matter who is in power in the country, is always interested in meddling and applying pressure on the media to bring it inline. Politicians are still able to use the media for their own interests. This brings about negative reputations to the media industry. The public media houses are not wholly independent as they would like to be and are mostly in charge of paying lip service to the people whilst really working on behalf of the ruling party and its interests.

The legal framework does not cause the biggest problem for an independent media. It is caused by the people itself. Even if laws exist to protect the freedom of expression, people often undermine it in seeking their own political or private interests.

Nevertheless institutions such as the Media Council of Malawi try to monitor irregularities. Several international operating NGOs compile regularly studies about any development in Malawi and look to see any changes in the countries health, economy and particularly the media.

The media in Malawi's economy wants to be competitive. The television sector however is the only public broadcaster without any competitors.

Other sectors have a balanced market with several competing media houses. Radio broadcasters, which are the most widely used medium in Malawi, have a more balanced market.

According to the Managing Director of Capital FM, Alaudin Osman, community radio stations are very important for the development in Malawi.

The telecommunications sector is growing fast. But at the current stage it is still quite small. Telecommunication services are generally very expensive in Malawi. The Internet is only affordable to a small number of the population.

Nevertheless the statistics show that a market exists and with new movements towards liberalisation by the government and bigger competition in the market things will eventually get easier for access to be made available to the public.

Gender ratios in the media in Malawi are similar to the neighbouring countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Those ratios are far away from being balanced. The Media system in Malawi has several difficulties. The Media Council of Malawi listed a number of issues that affect the media environment negatively. Interest in international matters almost does not exist.

However with all these criticisms in mind the media system has made much progress till the present day. The media industry is at the same stage as any other sector of the economy. It is growing gradually and starting to be a serious market for investors to pay attention in. But as long as representative monitoring is missing, investments will remain difficult to attract. For a viable commercial operating market it is a massive concern.

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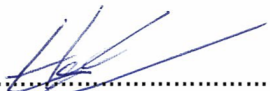


## **Selbständigkeitserklärung**

### **(Declaration of personal contribution)**

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